



THE MACREDDIN PURE MILE

Our hedgerows, wild edible plants and the long field

We've all grown up with The Long-Field...City Folk see it as green ditches with no footpaths as soon as they have escaped the Urban. Cattle and sheep view it as manna from heaven when they escape out on to it from their closures and Rural Folk are always delighted to inform fellow farmers that it is their stock that has escaped onto The Long-Field and not their own.

Cattle and sheep might not make for the very best of successful fugitives, but they know where to find the good stuff...along the hedgerows!

In Ireland there are 203,200 miles of hedgerows, ditches and natural town land plantations, providing probably more public access per hectare to native plants, herbs and leaves than in any other country world-wide.

Wicklow's title as The Garden of Ireland is not by coincidence, for it is in Wicklow that the divergence of Ireland's wild edible plants comes to a pinnacle.

The Macreddin Pure Mile is a prime example of this diversity that is unique to this County. Here we highlight just some of wild edible herbs, leaves, berries, mushrooms and fruits that grow naturally along our Pure Mile!



Rosehips are a member of the same family as the apple, during the Second World War they provided a huge amount of vitamin C and were also used as a sugar substitute. Like apples they also contain pectin, which can be used to make jams and preserves. There are rosehips growing wild along the hedgerow at the upper end of The Pure Mile before Macreddin Church...



Penny Worth is a Wild off-season leaf that has been used in Ireland as a Winter nutrient for centuries. Perfect in salads, it has a moist cucumbery, peppery taste and likes to grow in dry stone walls facing a north-easterly direction out of the full light of the sun. The left hand side of the straight run from Macreddin Bridge to the Church suits perfectly...



The Penny Bun is one of Ireland's most precious mushrooms fruits along the Macreddin Pure Mile. The penny is a member of the cep/bolete family and is currently worth €34 per kilo as a wild food on the markets. The Penny Bun attaches itself to a certain tree roots, two such trees along The Pure Mile are silver Birch and Oak.



The Rowan is a native tree that grows along our hedgerows. It provides a not too sweet berry that is pretty good for making a traditional savoury jelly to have with our Sunday roasts. But it also cool to mix with dough for breads and as an ingredient for an early winter game dishes. The blackbirds have a field day every year removing these before humans get the opportunity. Examples of rowan are on the left hand side from the Bridge to the Church Walk.



Sheep sorrel is a wild herby leaf that's found growing along our ditches and grasslands, Macreddin Bridge is perfect; it's easy to find in the early spring before the long grasses and other plants start growing over it. But that's the time to take note of where it is, so that you can return later and harvest. Wild sorrel is bitter and lemony and is so suited to salads but also to all our native oily fish when they're on the run such as mackerel, herring and trout, as a tart sauce or dressing its perfect...as a soup it's stunning.



Wood sorrel, like all sorrels also has a wonderful citrus flavour. More delicate than the sheep sorrel, it is perfect in a summer salad, as also is its beautiful flower. On the Macreddin Pure Mile, wood sorrel can be found growing in the protected wood land just after the Macreddin Bridge on the left hand side



The sloe is the last berry to survive on the tree's in Ireland, it is bitter and so makes for a great addition to biscuits for cheese or a wonderful game sauce enhancer. Harvesting in Ireland was only ever done after the first frost because this bursts the fruit and gives a fuller flavour to whatever the fruit was used for, including sloe gin. There are fine examples of the sloe growing on the left hand side of the Pure Mile near the entrance to The Cemetery Lane



The elder is just a fabulous tree; it provides us with a spring harvest of flowers that traditionally gives our Irish foods the first taste of summer. The elder flower is pure white and is very recognisable in spring. On The Pure Mile here, it grows on both sides. The flower makes for great cordials, wines and champagnes as well as deep fried elder flower fritters!



The elder does it again in autumn, when it provides juicy succulent wild and free fruit that is just fab for those deep down and earthy foods that we love in the winter. traditionally dried as 'gipsy raisins' the berry will keep its flavours all winter long and make for great additions to Christmas puddings, turkey or goose stuffing or most importantly mulled wine!



The gorse is so symbolic to Wicklow and Ireland. This beautiful yellow flower with its mild perfume and crunchy taste is so perfect for salads or for sprinkling over baby new Irish potatoes or indeed for making the traditional Irish wild gorse wine. Gorse is available right through our Macreddin Pure Mile.



Crab apple is such a necessary tree for Ireland. It provides our native bee's with super nectar pollens early in the year. After cross pollination and in return...well, we get apples, simple! Not apples for eating, we have orchards for that (there is an example of an old orchard beside the hotel entrance on the pure mile). But crab apples are best for their pectin in jam making etc. there is a fine specimen opposite The Church at the top of The Pure Mile.



Wild Herb Robert grows on both sides of our pure mile. Traditionally used in Ireland as a medicine, herb Robert makes for also a good salad addition. Easily recognisable with its flat parsley style leaves in either green or russet and its powerful small and delicate pink flower, both are useable.



The dandelion has not always been scorned as a weed. In Victorian times the leaf was a delicacy, it still is! The roots are the main ingredient in root beer as well as providing nitrogen to the soil. The flowers provide the first burst of colour along our Pure Mile every year, whilst providing nectar for the early bees and ethylene for our wild fruits to ripen.



The wild primrose is best found on the Macreddin Pure Mile in the hedgerow at the old apple orchard, just below The Stable House. Although called the 'first rose' it is not a relative of the rose. Another early flowering plant it provides a splash of colour to our road as well as our salads, together with its baby leaves.



There are wild honeysuckles climbing vines both at the lower and upper end of the Macreddin Pure Mile. The honeysuckle flower when it's in full bloom provides a heady evening scent when we walk our road. The flower also has wonderful nectar in its base that tastes as sweet as its name.



Wild pea grows in profusion on both sides of the Macreddin Pure Mile. Otherwise called bush vetch, its climbing tentacles help it remain above summer growth for easy identification. The domestic pea is a direct descendent and the flavour comes through best in its young leaves. Like all legumes, it also provides great nitrogen to the soil as well as protein for animals on the long field!



The wild strawberry grows best between Nolan's Bank and The Little Bridge. It's always good to identify the plant in flower as the summer growth ultimately covers all by the time it fruits. Brushing back the growth to uncover the tiny red berry is a treat for us all, as is the sweet and highly perfumed fruit.



The wild St. Georges mushroom and common field mushroom grows in The Horse Field below Stapleton's. St George fruits first every year and then it's the meadow mushrooms turn. Both are easily identifiable with their usual and highly recognisable white cap. Great in a scrambled egg breakfast after an early morning walk up The Macreddin Pure Mile.



The wild driad's saddle mushroom grows on two separate trees on Macreddin Pure Mile. One tree, down at Macreddin Bridge, and the other at The Horse Field. The saddle does not fruit every year and really is dependent on the weather. Best eaten when very young and not woody, these mushrooms, sliced are perfect for summer barbeques



We all have a love/hate relationship with the wild blackberry. It, just about grows everywhere on our Pure Mile. As a creeping bush, we call it bramble and don't really like it; bramble can take over up to 9 metres of hedgerow in one year. As a fruiting bush though we love it and call it blackberry and yes, we all remember picking its fruits as children.



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